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ABSTRACT

This guide describes the curriculum for the Children's Literature Course at the New Futures School, a high school for pregnant and parenting teens. In addition to teaching the students about good literature which is written for children, one of the main objectives of the course is to convince teen parents of the importance of reading aloud to their children. Each week students read 10 children's books and write a critical review for each book. They also read children's magazines and report on different magazine features. Reviews of magazine articles written about reading aloud to children are discussed in class. Teen parents learn to do crafts with young children and take field trips of interest to young children. At the beginning of each semester, a self-awareness exercise is shared with class members; for example, a student might asssemble a personality quilt square, a collage, or a coat-of-arms. Students create two children's books during the semester by following course guidelines for creating picture books, zip-lock baggy books, cloth or texture books, or peek-a-boo books. Book-making guidelines and instructions for some crafts are provided in the report, as is a brief comparison of the cooking process and the writing process. (RJC)

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Using Children's Literature to Motivate Teen Parents to Read to Their Children

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CURRICULUM

Children's Literature is a course unique to New Futures School, a high school for pregnant and parenting teens. In addition to teaching our students about "good" literature which is written for children, one of the main objectives of this course is to convince teen parents of the importance of reading aloud to their children. Our young parents are exposed to, help choose, and take part in activities aimed at developing them into advocates of reading to their babies from birth. Then, they can return to their communities to spread this fervor to others.

Children's Literature is a semester course for English credit so immediately the students are introduced to children's books as a form of literature. For classroom use, we have our books organized in this way: concept books; books about holidays and celebrations; values and self-concept books; fables, fairy tales and legends; Caldescott medal books; books about countries and cultures; books using poetry; unusually illustrated books; and books by selected authors.

One of the things which makes our course unique is the fact that we have access to our day care centers. Each Children's Literature student goes to one of the day care centers and reads aloud to a small child every week. This has proved to be quite successful. Before going to actually read, we discuss what to expect and techniques and strategies to use.

Another thing which we incorporate into our course is the making of crafts by our students both for their children and with their children. Not only is this a lot of fun but learning appropriate and inexpensive crafts enhances the quality time which our students spend with their children. Doing crafts for and with their children improves both the student's self-esteem and the child's self-esteem.

We believe that it is of great importance to incorporate into this course activities which emphasize the cultural traditions which are represented in our community. It is important that our parenting students recognize the importance of retaining the traditions of their cultures. It is equally important that our students be made

aware of and sensitive to other cultural traditions. Therefore, we seek to introduce as many culturally related projects into our curriculum as possible. Whenever the opportunity presents itself, we go on fieldtrips and have guest speakers come in to speak to our classes.

Plans for each week are designed to include these factors:

1. Book reviews:

One of the primary objectives of this course is to acquaint teen parents with as many books written for children as possible. Therefore, we read approximately 10 books each week and write a critical review for each book. Students are asked to write the following about each book:

-the title
-the author
-the age for which the book is intended
-paragraph (critical review) which considers the following questions:

Is this book appropriate for the age intended?
Are the illustrations colorful, interesting, appropriate, stimulating, imaginative, creative, etc.?
Are emotions aroused? Is the story moving? Is it truthful?
Are ideas from the book compatible with your beliefs?
What does the child learn from the book?
(Any other things you feel are important?)

-grade which you would give the book: A,B,C,D,F

Books can be organized in whatever way the instructer wishes to be presented to the students. For example, in the past we have used the following classifications to group books for class study: Caldecott medal books; fables, fairy tales, and legends; books about holidays; primary concept books; poetry books; books by different authors.

2. Magazine Article Reviews:

Anytime we find an article which relates to reading aloud to children, we use it in class. Students read it, discuss it,

and, then, write a review which includes the following:

-name of magazine (underlined)
-date of magazine
-title of the article (in quotation marks)
-time it took you to read it (in minutes)
-a 2 paragraph comment: 1st paragraph summarizes the article; second paragraph gives your opinion about the article supported by details from the article.

3. Children's Magazine Reviews:

We collect copies of magazines published for children. Students read the entire magazine and, then, report on it by writing the following:

-name of magazine (underlined)
-date of magazine
-approximate time you took to read it (in minutes)
-two paragraphs which tell things about the magazine such as:
  -what you liked or disliked
  -types of articles
  -types of stories
  -types of activities, etc.
  -the age for which this publication is intended

4. Crafts:

One class session each week is devoted to learning how to do a craft which can be done with a young child. We concentrate on crafts for children three years old and younger but our crafts can be done with older children, also.

5. Fieldtrips:

Another objective of this course is to introduce our teen parents to activities which can be done with children in our community. Some field trips which we have made are to a local Indian pueblo, the New Mexico Museum of Natural History, the local branch of the library, the Pueblo Indian Cultural Center, and a local children's bookstore.

Activities Intended to Enhance Self-Awareness and Self-Esteem

It is our belief that parenting students need to know who they are and what they want in order to be effective parents. Therefore, we begin each semester with at least one of the following self-awareness exercises.

1. Personality Quilt Square

   Each student assembles a collage in the form of a square which shows a minimum of six different things about herself. Examples:

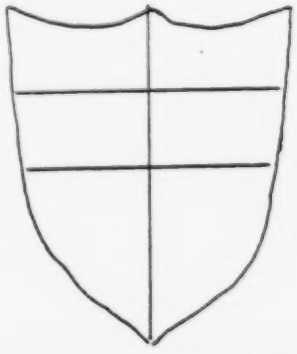
   - things like to do, to eat, etc.
   - things dislike to do, to eat, etc.
   - how she wishes to be remembered after she leaves the school
   - future plans
   - places where she's lived
   - places where she wishes to visit
   - important ideas or beliefs

2. Collage

   Same as above but in any shape.

3. Coat-of-Arms

   Students draw a coat-of-arms shape on a peice of construction paper or any size paper they wish. Divide coat-of-arms into six sections. Example:



Students use this coat-of-arms to show six different things about themselves. In addition to the list of items in "Personality Quilt Square", students may wish to show their zodiac signs, birthdays, or other important dates in their lives. Pictures drawn by student or cut from magazines may be used as well as any symbols or designs student wishes.

All of these exercises provide something visual students then use to introduce themselves to other class members. "Personality Quilt Squares" may be put together on a wall to form a huge class quilt. All of these may be displayed and, then, later used as covers for booklets or reports.

Student Made Books

Some of the best books for babies and toddlers are those which parents make themselves. The following are suggestions for books which can be made from inexpensive materials.

1. Picture Book:

Students follow these steps to create their picture books for children.

Step #1 READ!

Read as many books as you can. If you are writing an "ABC/123" book, we have some in our "ABC/123" box but don't stop there. Go to the library and grab the ones there off of the shelves. Raid younger sisters', brothers', friends', and cousins' books, too! Practice reading some of them aloud using the techniques we've discussed in class. Write picture book reviews for each of them.

Step #2 Your CHECKLIST!

Look over the book reviews which you've written and list the things which you liked about the books you read. This will be your "checklist" to use as you write, revise, and re-revise your book.

Step #3 3-MINUTE FREE-WRITES

Now you are ready to brainstorm ideas for the text (written part) of your book. Begin by taking a 3 x 5 sized paper and writing down all of the family related names which you can in 3 minutes. Write down names of aunts, uncles, pets, cars, etc. Keep writing for 3 minutes without stopping. Your pen should stay on the paper. Save this paper.

Next, use another 3 x 5 paper to brainstorm things you might want to say in your text. Even if you are writing an alphabet or counting book, try to really personalize it! Make this a special book for a special child - either your own or one in your family. Use your list of family related names to brainstorm a text which is uniquely yours. For example, "A is for Adam who lives in Algodones." If you need more space, use another 3 x 5 sized paper.

Step #4 WRITE!

Now you are prepared to write your actual text. Use lined notebook paper and mark a small "x" in the margin on every other line. Write only on those lines. (This makes it easier to revise and re-revise later.) Use your brainstorming papers to create a special story for a special child.

Step #5 REVISE!

After you have finished the text of your book, read it silently to yourself. Use your checklist to check your text and make certain that you have included those things which you thought were important. Make changes!

Then find a person who will be brutally honest. Ask this person to read your text and suggest changes which will improve it. Ask her to check your spelling and grammar, too.

Step #6 RE-REVISE!

Stand back and look at your text with different eyes! Re-shape, re-work, and use checklist to revise again!

Step #7 ARRANGE YOUR PAGES!

Divide up the story into pages for a children's book. Mark where you want to start each new page.

Get the paper for your book. You may use any size paper that you wish but be certain that all pages are the same size. Buy your own paper or see me for it.

Step #8 WRITE THE TEXT ON THE PAGES.

Rewrite the story on the actual book pages. (It's a good idea to do it in pencil first.) Allow 1/2" on the left side of each page for binding space.

Step #9 ILLUSTRATE YOUR BOOK

It's best to do your own drawings. They can be very childlike! Experiment with stick figures, drawings made out of shapes or drawing with your "wrong" hand. You don't need talent - just guts! Have fun with this!

Step #10 MAKE A COVER FOR YOUR BOOK

This will be laminated and bound along with your book. You may wish to include a dedication page, also.

Students in our class are required to use these steps to make two books during the semester. These books are laminated, bound, and returned to them to use with their children.

2. Zip-lock Baggy Book:

a. Use purchased zip-lock type plastic sandwich-sized or storage-sized bags.
b. Cut construction paper the right size for paper to slide easily into the bag.
c. Use cardboard in between 2 papers for stiff, board book pages.
d. Glue pictures of objects desired to each page.
e. Outline pictures with heavy, black marker to direct child's attention to picture.
f. Label each picture in lower case letters using black marker.
g. Staple zip-locked edges of baggies together.
h. Cover staples with masking tape.
i. Suggestions for items to use in this type of book are:

-faces of other babies cut from magazines
-snapshots of faces of family members
-pictures of nutritious foods
-objects in alphabetical order

3. Cloth or Texture Book:

   a. Find a variety of textured cloth scraps.

   b. Use pinking shears to cut cloth scraps to desired size.

   c. Leave as is or stitch pages together around the edge.

   d. May sew buttons and colorful trims on pages.

4. Peek-a-Boo Book

   a. Cut paper for pages.

   b. Glue pictures of faces of family members or from magazines in center of each page.

   c. Cut cloth squares large enough to cover face plus one inch extra at top.

   d. Glue top edge of fabric above picture of face.

   e. Use book by uncovering each page and saying, "Peek-a-boo!"

Crafts Intended for Parents to Do "For and With" Children

One of the most rewarding parts of this course is instructing teen parents in the creative crafts "for" and "with" their children. Our crafts are intended to be inexpensive as well as simple enough for a very young child to do and enjoy. The following are examples of the types of crafts used in this course.

a. L'Egg Books

-use plastic egg shaped containers which previously contained pantyhose.

-fold and staple blank pages (cut small enough to fit into closed containers) into a little book.

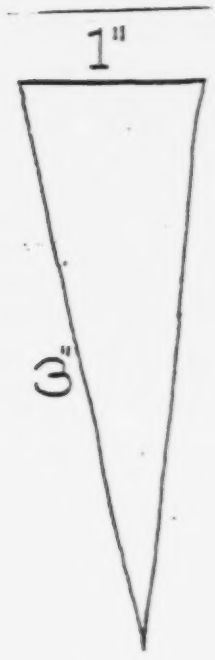
-put stickers (or other small pictures) on every other page.

-if you wish, print simple story which relates to pictures on the blank pages.

b. Wrapping Paper Beads

-save wrapping paper from birthdays and other holidays.

-make 36 long pennant-shaped triangles from old wrapping paper. See figure below:



-put glue in wrong side of triangle.

-using a plastic straw, roll triangle around straw beginning at 1" side and ending at the point.

-if desired, spray with clear acrylic or brush with clear nail polish or glue.

-slide off straw; let dry.

-string on piece of yarn for necklace.

c. Meat Tray Montage

-save plastic trays on which meat is sold at super market.

-glue different shaped pastas, buttons, fabric scraps, seeds, or anything else found nearby to tray to form any type of picture.

d. Cereal Box Lacing Cards

-save old cereal boxes

-cut out pictures.

-punch holes with hole puncher around pictures.

-use yarn or shoelaces for lacing around the pictures.

COOKING UP THE WRITING PROCESS

Getting ingredients:

You may gather ingredients in many different places. May go to supermarket, look on pantry shelves, or, even, borrow from a neighbor. May have to really dig deep in the back of those shelves to find something you've put away a long time ago. Sometimes what you find determines what you decide to cook.

Prewriting:

You may collect information from many different sources. May use different techniques (free writing, brainstroming, etc.) to come up with what you're going to write about. May have to dig deep before you're ready to write. What you find often determines what you write.

Reading the recipe:

You get the recipe out and read it. May have to try different cookbooks. Sometimes you discover that you're missing an ingredient so you go back to the store.

Drafting:

Get whatever you've collected down on paper. May have to try different forms (prose, poetry, essay, etc.) until you find what you want. Sometimes you discover that you haven't collected all that you need so you go do some more prewriting.

Preparing/assembling ingredients:

This is where the real cooking is done. Sometimes things need to be chopped, diced, minced, or blended. Sometimes things need to be added in a certain way; ie, butter and sugar creamed before adding eggs and vanilla. Sometimes you get others to taste it for you and tell you if it needs anything like salt or more spices. The way things are prepared and assembled is what separates ordinary cooks from gourmet chefs. If things don't go well, may have to go shopping again or reread that recipe.

Revising:

This is where the real writing is done. Now it's time to re-arrange, delete, add, elaborate, etc. Sometimes sentences, paragraphs, phrases must be placed in a certain order in order to work. Sometimes you get others to read what you've written and give you some feedback. It's revising which separates ordinary writers from the immortal ones. If a piece isn't working, may have to go back to prewriting and drafting again.

Cooking:

Now it's time to pour your creation into the pot or pan and bake, saute, or fry it. Ingredients have been added or left out according to your needs and desires. It's just the way you want it but you may need to get out the air bubbles.

Editing:

Now it's time to give what you've written a final check. You've revised and re-revised until you're sure that this is your final product. You need to check for G.U.M.P.S. (grammar, usage, mechanics, punctuation, and spelling.)

Serving:

Your moment of glory. Your creation is served to others. Sometimes those others are friends or family who will be kind and worry about hurting your feelings. Sometimes those others will be people who do not know you and will not care about you. Your creation must now stand on it's own and be judged for itself.

Publishing:

Your moment of glory. Your work is printed and read by others. Sometimes those others are people who know you and will be kind to your work. Sometimes those others are strangers. Your work must now stand on it's own and be judged for itself.